



## **Community Forum on Culture**

The Forum on Culture sponsored by the Little Rock Racial and Cultural Diversity Commission ([www.littlerock.org/CityManager/Divisions/RacialAndCulturalDiversityCommission](http://www.littlerock.org/CityManager/Divisions/RacialAndCulturalDiversityCommission)) and the Nehemiah Group ([www.nehemiah-group.org](http://www.nehemiah-group.org)) on June 12, 2007 at University of Arkansas Clinton School of Public Service was the second of a three part series whose sole purpose was and is to provide a framework for better understanding ourselves in relation to racial, cultural and faith-based grids through which we all tend to view reality.

Thus, like the other forums, the forum on culture was not intended to specifically address the current issues facing the LRSD or to provide a setting for the promotion of related agendas. Rather, these forums consider how decisions can and should be made apart from contentious emotion. Thus, organizers hoped to provide a context for such understanding and tools for working alongside others in a variety of situations with whom we disagree. Ultimately, however, organizers hope their efforts will encourage the greater community of Little Rock to help resolve current points of contention in the best interest of young people and the city of Little Rock.

We hope as we prepare for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the integration of Little Rock Central High School this year that the courage to make a change is remembered and respected.

## **Forum on Culture Panel**

Dr. Sunny Anand, UAMS Professor of Pediatrics and President of the Sri Sathya Sai Baba Center of Little Rock

Dr. Terry Trevino-Richard, UALR Sociology Professor

Younna El-Sabaa, Heifer International Marketing Associate

Dr. Beatrice Reed, President of the Arkansas Optometric Association

Moderators: Mayo Johnson, Chair of the Little Rock Racial and Cultural Diversity Commission and Mark DeYmaz of the Nehemiah Group.

**Next Forum on Faith:** 6:30 – 8:30 p.m. on Tuesday, August 14, 2007  
Mosaic Church of Central AR  
6420 Colonel Glenn Rd., Little Rock, AR

### **Key Questions**

1. What is culture?
2. What should we understand about culture that can help us in critical thinking, decision-making and conflict resolution?
3. How can we avoid cynicism, division and destructiveness built purely on cultural grids in order to promote civil discourse and social harmony?

### **Forum Summary**

Based on panelist comments and exchanges with the audience, we identified four major accomplishments of this forum as well as three recommendations. Furthermore, audience feedback is summarized.

#### ***What were the major accomplishments of the forum on culture?***

##### **1. The impact cultural differences have on civil discourse and social harmony was underscored.**

The diverse, standing room only crowd, estimated at over 100 people, provided evidence that the topic was of interest to a large array of people. The primary goal of these forums is to promote civil discourse and social harmony. Panelists stressed that we all need to learn to recognize and accept that cultural differences exist, impact our values, and influence the way we talk and interpret each other. In short, culture informs the very rules that guide our social interactions.

As we consider the various norms and values that influence our interactions, Youmna El-Sabaa, new marketing associate at Heifer International, a panelist originally from Egypt by way of New York, used an analogy of a stoplight. In her analogy, she suggested that we replace the word *culture* with the word *rules*. Then, imagine going to a stoplight after an electrical outage—no green for go, red for stop—how do we treat that stoplight? We take turns—we treat it as a four-way stop sign. *No one ever told us that—we just know that's the new rule for this situation.* We rely on communication rules in a similar manner. Understanding cultural differences is critical because, like the traffic analogy, we arrive at intercultural interactions and may actually have different assumptions about how to move forward.

##### **2. Diversity is present beyond race and within racial groups.**

The notion of the *social construction of reality* was introduced. Dr. Trevino-Richard, a professor of sociology at UALR, stated: *It doesn't matter that there's only one race, one DNA, it doesn't matter that the term "race" isn't scientific. If you perceive differences between groups, you have created that reality, and you respond as through those differences were real.*

As we respond to these socially constructed realities, a significant discussion point was that race is not a sufficient term to capture human diversity. Cultural differences and commonalities cut across and exist within racial as well as national or ethnic culture groups. Thus while a person may hold a cultural identity based in Hispanic or African or European heritages, the diversity within each of these groups should not be overlooked. Several panelists stressed the limits of reducing cultural understanding to a racial group.

Dr. Trevino-Richard illustrated the importance of moving past simplistic understandings of culture and race. He noted that *societies have boundaries—we know where the United States are, ..., and they contain institutions which govern us.* In contrast, *cultures have much greater scopes in time.* Thus, historically, a US citizen's identity might include multiple cultures that cut across societies or country groups. Dr. Trevino-Richard's name and history illustrated this point with a mix of Cajun and Spanish ancestry that still impacts everything from food choices to greeting behaviors such as hugging. Furthermore, ethnic, class, and geographical subcultures must be understood as well. In fact, economic class groups display more similarity among ethnic groups than among those groups as a whole. For instance, to break one stereotype, Dr. Trevino-Richard noted that upper income blacks tend to have fewer children than upper income white families.

### **3. Culture was presented as both a source and a resource for improving social discourse.**

Culture is typically viewed as the hidden obstacle in interactions. In this view, culture is the hidden aspect of the *iceberg*. The iceberg analogy helps us see the importance of understanding implicit or unconsciously held rules for interaction. This analogy reminds us that just what we see on the surface is only the tip of the cultural iceberg. However, the panelist went further to indicate the culture is more than an obstacle or more than something hidden under the surface. We must learn to not only understand and value differences but find ways to view culture as a source or perhaps a *tool box* that we can draw on to adapt to and enhance our interactions. Several overlapping processes discussed by each panelist captured this process:

- Self awareness of our attitudes and our own culture
  - We must examine our own attitudes, as a first step in intercultural competence, according to Dr. Anand.
  - Youmna El-Sabaa stressed that because we learn our rules early in life from parents and friends, we tend to think *my rule is right and yours wrong.* Thus, we must be *introspective, to decide which rules we keep, which we bend, which we throw out from time to time.*
- Knowledge of other cultures

- Dr. Reed indicated that improving conflict resolution and reducing cynicism involves less stereotyping based on culture and then we must go further--*learn about other people, other cultures.*
- Dr. Anand stressed that we must attempt to acquire *the values and skills for working across cultures. We must remember everyone brings to their life a culture, a tradition, religion, a ritual—everyone has that unique, special flavor they bring to life.*
- Flexibility, adapting
  - Dr. Reed noted that when a person responds in a certain way, realize that *there's a reason for that response*, and that we can learn to *relax in our own rules and acknowledge those of others.*
  - If we identify rules that are core or that we desire to keep, versus rules that we can bend or even throw out from time to time, we become *flexible enough to interact with others who are different from us.* According to Youmna El-Sabaa, such flexibility means we can expand and grow, learn from others, and can grow and adapt.

#### **4. The promise and challenge of diversity in the USA and Arkansas surfaced.**

A complex picture of cultural and racial diversity was presented --one that presented both hope and cause for concern. Dr. Trevino-Richard stated that as a socially constructed concept, race has become *very important to Americans.* For instance, he noted that members of minority groups in America preface their remarks with, *As a black male* or *As a black woman.* In contrast, dominant social group members tend not to preface their remarks.

Not every country, according to Dr. Trevino-Richard, has this communication behavior of prefacing. For instance, Latinos who immigrate are often asked what race they are--no one had ever asked them that. In other countries, religion or caste often is what separates people, but in the USA it tends to be race.

Youmna El-Sabaa challenged the notion that the presence of diversity *equals acceptance.* She noted that that her experience in New York was not so positive, it was diverse, but it was also sometimes contentious--*a person was killed because of being different,* she lived in a changing neighborhood where gangs of children began to fight each other. Being exposed to other cultures doesn't necessarily mean valuing those cultures--in New York, her name was made fun of all the time. When she moved to Arkansas, no one ever made fun of her name.

The conflict in the LRSD was introduced by Dr. Trevino-Richard as a good example of *people creating differences--of reifying those perceptions.* He noted that social scientists tend to see *the root of difference to be competition. When individuals are placed in a competitive environment, prejudice and discrimination result; cooperative activities are a means of reducing those differences, while events where people compete—including via debate—increase those divisions.*

Dr. Richard provided a historic context for hope. *There is discrimination, but this does change. Every industrialized country is diverse, and experiences the problems we experience. We won't become a Spanish-speaking country, but speaking Spanish will become more valuable. More people intermarrying—people declaring themselves to be mixed race—this is new.*

Dr. Anand continued by commenting on what he views as *isolation in America, coming from the obsession with the self*. He stressed that we are *a global community—the world has gotten smaller, and the days of being the superpower are vanishing. It's going to be a level playing field. America must take its place as an equal in the world.*

**Building on these four positive accomplishments, four areas merit attention in future forums aimed to improve civic discourse and social harmony.**

**1. Encourage discussion between participants with different perspectives on the topic of diversity.**

While there was a high number of diverse participants both on the panel and the audience, time constraints did not allow for dialogue across difference. Thus, while the importance of valuing difference was stressed, those present by and large shared this worldview and value set. In short, the way diversity was understood was held in common by those present.

We need to consider participants who hold diverse views on the *construct of diversity*. For instance, a different perspective on cultural diversity captures the history of cultural change and borrowing. Dr. Trevino-Richard noted that cultures change and shift. Such changes come from cultural borrowing, such as the African contribution to southern cooking. Over time, national or geographically based cultures have introduced new approaches to everything from farming to navigation to art and music and faith practices. Such a discussion would help enrich our understanding of cultural sharing, rather than a primary focus on valuing difference as if respecting culture means not influencing or being open to influence. The assumption held by a cultural borrowing perspective is that there are some cultural practices that are *valued more*, practices that other cultures borrow because they are more effective or useful to them in some way or prove to be a more convincing way of life.

**2. Specific elements of cultural differences need to be explored.**

Panelists did not have time to fully explore one of the questions: *What should we understand about culture that can help us in critical thinking, decision-making and conflict resolution?*

The panelists provided a general guides in response to this question (e.g., being aware of difference, adapting to others), but this area merits more attention. In order for such an

event to work well, organizers need to provide a context for such understanding and tools for working alongside others in a variety of situations with whom we disagree.

Thus, building on this forum, in which a context for understanding was provided, specific tools for working with those with whom we disagree could be provided. A few key principles should be stressed in setting up such a forum:

- Present basic dimensions of culture that may aid in understanding different assumptions about conflict management. For example, the notion of *low and high context* has been widely documented as a difference in interpretive sets across cultures. High context cultures tend to be Asian and Hispanic and tend to rely on rituals, nonverbal cues, and are less direct in their communication. In contrast, low context communicators and cultures tend to be North American and Western European and place an emphasis on directness, literal verbal meanings, and less meaning is conveyed in non-verbal cues.
- In some cases greater cultural sensitivity will help resolve or minimize differences. In other instances however, when cultural differences are not the real cause of conflict or even when cultural understanding is achieved, deeply held competing beliefs or values must still be managed.
- Thus, beyond cultural understanding, participants would need to appeal to higher universal norms. For example, panelists who have different viewpoints on some specific issue (e.g., the School Board issue) could talk about not only how culture or faith affects their view but how their culture and/or faith could be a spring board to find common ground.

### **3. Create a setting in which an actual dialogue between people with differing perspectives is moderated.**

With the above equipping, we should call together community members with diverse views on topics that sometimes divide us (e.g., schools, abortion, immigration, environment, etc). A moderator should be equipped to help participants learn to create productive conversations. A community dialogue project should consider accepted tenets of productive dialogue:

- Displaying *openness* by checking accuracy of interpretations
- Enacting *resoluteness* by assessing differences in ideas/norms while advocating positions.
- Accepting efforts at influence while avoiding coercive or manipulative effort.
- Engaging in talk that seeks the highest common good.

In this context, we could invite discussion about local issues and what is perceived as obstacles and opportunities from diverse groups. Such a dialogue would be more difficult to bring together. More preparation, more equipping of those involved, but such a step seems a natural extension of the success of the current forums.

### **4. Explore incentives to encourage cross-cultural engagement, especially for individuals and groups that are part of the dominant culture.**

As we consider engaging participants holding differing perspectives as well as encouraging a deeper understanding of cultural differences combined with improved equipping for dialogue, we need to also address the issue of motivation. As noted earlier, our participants, while diverse in age, gender, and culture, were highly motivated. Thus, it is fair to ask: *How can we better engage individuals and groups in future forms and dialogue projects?* Exploring motivational factors is particularly relevant for the dominant culture in that they may not feel a need to change or see the value in welcoming ideas, beliefs, and/or practices from other cultures. A few suggestions merit further exploration:

- Create a collaborative context for dialogue. Dr. Trevino-Richard stressed that one major factor determining the success of improved conflict resolution is whether those involved perceive their interaction as competitive or collaborative/cooperative. Thus, one challenge is to frame interactions in terms of a common good or goal that will transcend a competitive context. For example, a dialogue project could focus on equipping aimed at improving skills for workplace and community engagement.
- Encourage awareness of cultural interdependency from K12 education through higher education. While an increased number of citizens understand our global interdependence, progress still needs to be made in understanding the implications. Thus, at the foreground of our programming should be information on the imperative of improving intercultural competencies. For example, ethical, peace, demographic, and economic imperatives could be stressed in future educational venues.
- Build on current strong collaborative networks where members of the dominant culture groups are partnering for community development.  
Example networks already exist such as:
  - The Nehemiah group has taken initiative by supporting workshops on multiethnic churches, participating with the RCDC in past interfaith collaboration, supporting a new network to improve foster care services, donated time and monies to various inner city organizations and projects.
  - UALR continues to partner with Children International in a long-range effort to improve service to the community.
  - RCDC continues to champion a wide array of educational initiatives that has created a foundational for further partnerships.

*What remains to be done?* Groups already working on improving cultural understanding can work together to call other critical groups to the table. For example, we could systemically check for representation of major community sectors (e.g., housing and real estate, industry, education, medical) in future dialogue or other skill building projects.

## **Evaluation Form Feedback**

### **Question 1: In what ways do you see yourself working to improve your relationships with members of other cultures or cultural groups?**

- I am intentional about my behavior and I reach out to people different than I am.
- Working more with groups as this.
- Offer openness to varied cultures and backgrounds.
- Listening and communicating.
- I'm an anthropologist; I am a Caucasian who has lived in a predominantly black section of town for 20 years.
- I plan to write and hopefully publish articles discussing culture and socially constructed discrimination in "intra-racial" communication. Also, I would like to participate in more forums such as this one.
- My line of work; going to a church with a congregation of people who don't look like me. Interact personally with everyone I meet as a person.
- I approach and speak to people who do not look like me.
- Become more appreciative of differences in other people and to accept them without restrictions.
- In my work and through my children.
- In a one on one personal basis. Taking opportunities that present to get to know people from other countries and cultures personally.
- To try to help them understand in my church I am a member of. We have a diverse group of people that speak all different languages so I talk to them and them more welcome.
- End the drug war. Allow differences in lifestyle.
- Starting with myself and those around me. Leading by example.
- I feel just educating myself on culture norms – religious norms would help me to interact. And looking for gatherings with a diverse group.
- Intentionally spend time with people of different cultures and learning about them as people and their cultures.
- Understanding and tolerance are key factors in improving relationships.
- By being deliberate and open to all cultures/norms.
- I think there is so much to learn from people different that you – regional, ethnic, racial and economic differences – and I want to take advantage of that.
- I'm more conscious of accepting different sets of rules and of need for exchange of ideas, norms, etc. Also, I'll seek out different new friends.
- Interacting with people of other cultures – teaching young people about other cultures, languages, etc – I am studying Spanish.
- Making a large effort to understand other cultures and groups will help me interact with people who are culturally "unlike" me.
- Daily – mingling with others!
- Respecting others no matter how different they are from me.
- In my work; mainly there. Somewhat in my circle of friends and groups I associate with.



- I work with the Hispanic community. I try to teach my daughters to be open to different people, different ideas.
- Leadership is often accomplished by example. Actively being aware of cultural differences and trying to understand the difference that does exist.
- Working on community action groups.
- By beginning to substitute the word “rules” for the word culture. That really made sense to me.
- Keep my sense of humor about it all! Mainly on the job...in my estimation that is where the greatest exposure to different cultures happens – much more so than in schools or at church. I think this could be one of the most fruitful areas for ongoing dialogue and further work.

**Question 1: In what ways do you see yourself working to improve your relationships with members of other cultures or cultural groups? (continued)**

- Participating in public schools.
- Being more inclusive in my personal relationships.
- Having just moved here from a highly segregated state (NJ), I find Arkansas to be warm and welcoming. I have chosen a more diverse church than I would attend “up north”. As a teacher, I hope to teach in a more diverse school.
- Recognize people as people.
- By promoting intercultural and inter-religious relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- Initiative on campus at UALR to improve relationships across cultures. Time in Christian faith community to improve.
- I try to be inclusive and interested in people who have other cultures.
- I’m always wanting to learn more about different cultures and with my hope to be a diplomat, this aspect is absolutely crucial to both a successful career and more importantly, making the world a better place.
- I work daily with a diverse group of people. Listening and helping.
- Have sought to work with people of many different backgrounds, primarily through school volunteer & PTA activities.
- Working together for a common goal – community needs for example, that affect all of us, e.g. poverty, homelessness.
- No response. (7)

**Question 2: What is your view on cultural relations in Little Rock?**

- People fear difference and it is up to me to share who I am.
- Fair.
- My view is it is more talk of “relation” than real relating – or design to relate.
- Segregation, flight, subculture division.
- That there is a general assumption that because of the role of the city in cultural history that intercultural communication is not really an issue. I feel that people can separate culture and diversity from race.
- Lot of room for improvement. Defensive posturing.
- Cultural relations need improvement. I believe economics is the biggest cause of our divide.
- It has improved over the past years but improvement is needed.

- They are rapidly diversifying and the younger generation is much more tolerant.
- Based on the media, the relations seem poor. Among the population at large, there seems to be a lack of interest in getting to know or interact with other cultures.
- I think it is good and I think we should teach our children of all ages to help them.
- Racial profiling is not the problem. The drug war is a case of cultural genocide directed against hippies, blacks, Hispanics, and the young.
- There are pervious problems.
- Need much work with race.
- Good, but should be better. I love the idea of think of culture as class descendant.
- There may be a lot of gathers and I just don't know where to find them.
- Mixed pockets of people and different groups of "closed" and prejudiced people.
- More education is needed to bridge the cultural gap because of different views.
- Slowly changing.
- Dr. Amand's comment that we're all basically the same & Ms. El Sabaa's comment that it would be better if everyone was colorful.
- We are a unique city ( one of the most racially diverse school districts). We need to admit our problems and have organized ways to solve our problems.
- I appreciate the diversity I see around me and I want to be more involved with different people from different places. I moved here from Houston and miss the exposure to lots of different people.

**Question 2: What is your view on cultural relations in Little Rock? (continued)**

- Needs to be improved – we are growing more culturally diverse but the private schools keep us from knowing each other. I live in a racially & culturally mixed neighborhood, but we are economically segregated.
- I feel that we are biased and naïve and not many people try to understand cultures that are from their own.
- C-/B+
- The average person is not culturally aware of others.
- They are strained, embittered greatly by history between black/white people, but I am hopeful despite discouraging news/attitudes.
- Abysmal.
- Cultural relations are at an odd impasse in LR. Aside from the generally discussed cultures, LR's subcultures are also active and creating subtle tension in the young adults. Cultural relations are constantly changing and we have come a long way, though we are not and should never assume we will be done.
- There is a stigma now in LR because of the conflict on the school board that is somewhat negative.
- We have a long way to go...awareness is the first step...thank you for helping raise awareness.
- More economic than skin color.
- Improving due to dialogue.
- Cultures don't understand each other. For example LRSD. Everything has been divided by racial lines for years but when one group gains power everything becomes racial.

- I have lived in both California and New Jersey. Cultural relations here are much more cooperative and receptive to one another than either of those places. Little Rock's cultural diversity is more blended than either place.
- I've found they are far better (at least on the surface) than what I've seen in the NorthEast.
- There is a divide. However, I find a sense of decompartmentalization taking place that is profound.
- Need creative approach to address white flight.
- It is parsed black/white; it needs to be broadened beyond that.
- Haven't really viewed the situation lately, but I've seen that we are still dealing with problems not just here but everywhere, just in different ways.
- It needs a lot of work. Communication and cooperation are needed.
- In many cases, people seek ways to divide or categorize others (by race, religious denomination, income, neighborhood) instead of how to unite or cooperate. However, overall I have felt for 25 years that this is a very friendly place.
- LR is special because there are roots of hate that have been here a long time – so cultural relations need improvement – it'll take all of us working together.
- No response. (5)

**Question 3: What was the most beneficial aspect of this forum for improving understanding between cultures?**

- The diversity of thought. (2)
- The diverse background. (2)
- Egypt and India perspectives. Offer some idea of the black-white negative.
- Cooperative activities, one race.
- The emphasis is on cultural norms being constructs of social interactions between different people and groups. Cultural phenomenon is only as important or real as we make them. Things will be easier to change when people understand the barriers aren't really there.
- Reminders to be more open & learn to listen to others' perspectives.
- Emphasis that we must understand other cultures and not believe our culture is superior.
- Their frank and personal experiences and the differences they represent. Their comments were very valuable. (2)

**Question 3: What was the most beneficial aspect of this forum for improving understanding between cultures? (continued)**

- The observations offered by the panelists were very helpful to understanding cultural differences.
- It was interesting. I think that showed me a lot of understanding.
- Relax more when you don't understand.
- Hearing the FANTASTIC panelists explain culture without condescension, lofty/pie in sky ideals. Good to hear honest and imperfect opinions.
- The variety of panelists was great. The chance for all of them to talk was very helpful.
- That the discussion took place – we learned from each other by hearing different points of view.
- Learning, learning, teaching and implementing values learned.

- The aspect that culture is different to everyone but the same in several aspects and everyone should be more accepting.
- Helping to make “diversity” less of a label.
- We could talk about our “colorful” community and do so in a positive way. There is no progress in complaining and blaming.
- Great panelists from different perspectives.
- Open Q&A. Laughter. Non-anxious sharing.
- Good interaction – good ideas presented.
- I felt that the presentations given by the panelists were informative and thought-provoking and will encourage people to improve.
- We are the same race! Human!
- Respect, knowing and accepting the differences and the need to step out of our comfort zones.
- Saying it out loud. Deeply reflecting individuals.
- The excellence of the speakers and their candor.
- Creating a common vocabulary for discussing cultural similarities and differences.
- The dialogue.
- El-Sabaa’s comments. Dr. Amand’s powerful comments about competition, our similarities, etc.
- Bringing people from different cultures together.
- Questions – at least some of them.
- The different definitions of culture.
- The very fact that such a forum even exists. I have never seen a forum of this type on a local level.
- A coming together for a common purpose.
- The making of the audience!
- Hearing.
- It provides a safe space to have civil discussions about very contentious topics.
- It was very nice to see such a diverse forum in itself, not to mention the fact that, rather than just focusing on Little Rock, the questions posed were more universal in nature.
- Dr. Richard’s comment on getting different people to relate by working together.
- No response. (6)

**Question 4: Was there enough time given for the presenters to speak?**

- Yes. (35)
- No.
- No, they have a wealth of knowledge to share with us.
- I was late for presentations.
- Close, but they are so interesting I wish they could speak more.
- Yes, but one took much longer than the others.
- Yes, maybe too much.
- Yes, but there is never enough time. (2)
- No response. (5)

**Question 5: Was there enough time given to questions and answers from the participants?**

- Yes. (35)
- No. (2)
- Somewhat unorganized.
- Not sure.
- Some in the audience abused Q&A to get on their soapbox. I think all the questions should be submitted in writing.
- No but we could spend hours if we all got to talk.
- Some questions could have used more time to respond.
- It felt a bit rushed.
- I disagree with the format...I think we needed a chance to talk to/listen to one another ...maybe around a set of questions. I think this would have accomplished a lot more.
- Adequate.
- No response. (3)

**Question 6: Were the answers given to your questions satisfactory?**

- Yes. (25)
- Some. (2)
- There were good answers. So yes.
- Many of the answers seemed to be the panelists wanting to make a point rather than actually responding to a specific question. Nevertheless, all comments were interesting.
- Pretty good, one of the best forums I have attended in a long time: all of the speakers were articulate and engaging.
- Well done. I appreciate people's personal stories and humor as a way of answering.
- Very good dialogue, personal stories, examples.
- So, so. See #5 (I disagree with the format...I think we needed a chance to talk to/listen to one another ...maybe around a set of questions. I think this would have accomplished a lot more.)
- The answer is too complex to write down here.
- I let the better speakers ask the questions.
- Just led to further thinking.
- N/A. (3)
- No response. (9)

**Question 7: Was the facility and equipment conducive to learning and discussion?**

- Yes. (25)
- Bigger room needed. (5)
- Space was extremely tight, but the facility was nice.
- Acoustics are poor in that room & I'd like the Clinton School to try to improve it such as changing the walls for these events.
- It was too warm. Made me drowsy.
- Too cool.
- Very nice.
- The acoustics were a bit funny and we need a little more seating room.
- Yes – the volunteers could be more prompt with the microphones.
- Yes, much better than at the race forum.
- Yes! Quite comfortable and good snacks!

- We could have used more space for comfort, although it did give an intimate feel.
- Satisfactory, but not great. Too long to sit in fold-out chairs or stand in hallway because of space.
- Sturgis Hall is on the small side, but it serves its function well.

**Question 7: Was the facility and equipment conducive to learning and discussion? (cont.)**

- No! We needed to be at round tables where we could look into one another's eyes, listen to one another and speak to one another rather than listen to "experts."
- Excellent – better attention to audio would help.
- No response. (4)

**Question 8: What could we do to make this forum better?**

- Don't know/not applicable. (2)
- More space.
- This forum was great!
- Publicize, enlarge the space, invite children.
- First, we need to also look at gender inequality as well as life style difference before we can get past our prejudices.
- A platform elevated higher. It was really hard to see the speakers from the back. The content was great and the selection of speakers was fantastic.
- Better site with stadium seating: eg: Dickinson Auditorium @ UALR, AR Historic Museum.
- Include elected representatives of the city, county and state to be presenters along with others.
- Shorten it. Also spend some efforts to how relations can be improved locally.
- Will come back.
- Discuss topics using specific examples instead of abstract concepts.
- Do this but a larger scale.
- Have it more often and in more places (churches, schools, work places, government).
- Grow the vision within the state. Publish the meeting well in advance.
- Start with a few questions that the panelists have prepared answers for.
- Have a larger area – possibly inside the museum.
- Well done – Good choice of speakers.
- We could have used more space for comfort, although it did give an intimate feel.
- Nothing. It was great!
- More advertisement reaching more people make more aware.
- Probably move it to a larger, more comfortable auditorium. I got the most out of their responses to questions. Include more non-academic people.
- Perhaps address each of the questions separately before we reach the Q&A. Allow it to build as a dialogue with all speakers step by step instead of a full answer to all questions from each.
- Make every speaker adhere to the time limit for opening statements. Larger space. 1 ½ hours long enough.
- See answers 5,6,7 (I disagree with the format...I think we needed a chance to talk to/listen to one another...maybe around a set of questions. I think this would have

accomplished a lot more. We needed to be at round tables where we could look into one another's eyes, listen to one another and speak to one another rather than listen to "experts.")

-Small groups, perhaps.

-More than three. (2)

-Broken down into smaller groups and have some hands on training on diversity and inclusion.

-Bring it to the colleges and universities; then bring it to the high schools.

-A person (speaker) from each continent.

-Younger panelists of diverse backgrounds!

-Seek for diverse views on the panel e.g. no one addressed tensions of cultural relativism vs cultural universals; relativism was assumed.

-Like I said, its always nice to have more time.

-Better acoustics or sound equipment.

-Repeat in a similar format – especially for youth audiences – middle or high school students would benefit from a discussion of this type.

-No response. (12)

**Question 9: Do you want to have a similar forum on another topic related to racial and cultural diversity? If so, what topics are you interested in?**

-More workshops, educational sessions (library and the public school), re: culture traditions.

-Same topic – broader discussion.

-Why must we always hear of god referred to as male?

-Intra-racial discrimination is a big issue to several minority groups and has major implications for interpersonal relationships and self-esteem/perception.

-1) History of Immigration in USA since Columbus 2) Worldwide Immigration since 1960 (who, where, why)

-As noted above, the drug war is a case of cultural persecution.

-Yes. Poverty.

-Yes, can't wait for the religion talk. I would like to see a similar discussion but in regards to how diversity will manifest itself in the future of this community.

-Sure. For me...my ethnic background is Mexican. I am not fluent in Spanish, nor did I have big party for my 15<sup>th</sup> b-day, nor am I Catholic. And maybe this is Diversity, but if you can name what I am I think there are a few people here who can relate. I guess I just feel like I don't fit in any of the following: White or Hispanic. I am "other."

-Have more on the same topic and some different elements: with opportunities for small groups to talk together- mix folks up, let them talk to each other and share the smaller groups' insights and have a potluck meal with food from many nations and music.

-1) Economic empowerment, 2) How to fix our blighted areas in the city. Smaller classrooms for learning.

-Diversity in the LRSD.

-Class/economic diversity.

-I think another forum with more people and more work would be productive. This was great for the community and could keep going. Different panelists, these were great, but more viewpoints and more progress.

- How about some workshops with intercultural skill development as the focus?
- Yes, I would like to use basically the same question, but with high-school and college-age panelists.
- Yes! Sexism! Job Seeking!
- War: How does faith & reason abandon us at critical times?
- I'd like a forum on immigration issues and language: "illegal alien" vs "undocumented worker."
- Not sure. (2)
- Yes. Economic inequities in society. Homelessness.
- One good one would be foods of each culture.
- Sure, but this time on inter-cultural, racial, relationships between young adults.
- Need to understand reasons & cultural influences for high rates of single parent homes in African-American community.
- Hip-hop culture; media culture - music, film television.
- Diversity and American diplomacy would be fascinating, but it would probably be a tad esoteric.
- Women's Rights.
- Economic diversity – many of these issues could also apply to differences in household income.
- No response. (19)

#### **Question 10: General comments?**

- Excellent!
- Great program! (4)
- Forum was good. (2)
- Very, very good. (2)
- Good option. Need larger space, better platform for viewing & observing speakers.
- How can we become a country or a state of "oneness"? Do you think a fair education for every child will from this point forward would ease culture racism in the future?
- We need to really work on religious bias against those not in agreement that there may not be a god, except as a social construct by man to have control over others throughout history.
- Cleaner definitions of diversity is needed for those forums. We have to get past diversity being just race. Every person is diverse because they are different, they are individuals. We need to help people manage relationships with people who are different, past their physical appearance. Racial communication is a separate matter...
- I enjoyed the questions posed from the audience since many different perspectives were reflected; caused deeper level reflection on past of entire audience and panel.
- I found Youmna's comments to be especially insightful and helpful.
- Enjoyed hearing from each of the panelists, but I'd like to know to what end are we engaging in these discussions. Would supper clubs be as effective? Meaningful exchange in a more intimate setting. Also, how are the messages of these forums being played out in our community where they might actually be heard by those who aren't already searching for understanding?
- Good crowd for a June 12 forum.



- Presentations were very good. The presenters failed to discuss some of the real cultural differences that exist in LRSD.
- Very enjoyable.
- Thanks! (2)
- Stick to it!
- There is a need for next steps. The people coming to these forums, I believe, want to do something. Maybe a few follow up possibilities where people can deepen further on these topics and go into action would be in order.
- Excellent panelists – good interaction.
- I enjoyed this forum and hope to see improvement in Little Rock soon!
- The handout needed a citation to the laws referenced.
- Thank you for bring us together. This was very worthwhile. Keep working on the format.
- Excellent forum but in looking around at the crowd – you are “preaching to the choir.” How can we bring this message to others in the community?
- You must teach diversity to everyone. The ones that brought the hatred and hurt are dying off. So let that history die and teach the new ones diversity.
- This has been a wonderful experience! Having this forum is an example of what a “gem” the Clinton School is in the U.S. – and Arkansas – it promotes an atmosphere of cultural exploration and mutual understanding.
- Compared to USA in general to other “more open societies” yet left out countries, many that are less open (e.g. Russia, Pakistan, China...)
- Awesome; definitely look forward to the next one.
- How do people be open to individual differences and retain their own culture.
- Wonderful idea to have this – very timely and well done.
- Great women panelists – very diplomatic responses by all.
- No response. (11)

## **Partners**

Philander Smith College  
University of Arkansas Clinton School of Public Service  
Mosaic Church of Central Arkansas

## **Information**

Please contact Carlette Henderson, Executive Director of the Little Rock Racial and Cultural Diversity Commission at 501-244-5483 with questions about this report or Dr. Gerald Driskill, University of Arkansas at Little Rock at 501-569-3158.